

Public Safety & Services

Revised 7/06/06 PZ, KA, GA, DS

Public safety and service are provided by various departments within the City and the County, including the police and sheriff's departments, fire department, the hazardous materials team, emergency medical services, and the Gunnison Valley Hospital. This chapter discusses the growing needs for public safety and services based on population growth and demographic changes. The history of public safety services within the City of Gunnison will be discussed; trends and population growth will be addressed; then policy options and specific action statements will be recommended.

Background

Gunnison Police Department

The City of Gunnison was incorporated on February 28, 1880, and the Gunnison Police Department established on June 5, 1884 by the town Trustees. The Department was originally housed in a 22 by 25 foot jail/office/dog pound building located in the 100 block of South Wisconsin Street (near the present-day Forest Service garage). Today's Police Department is located on the second floor of the historical City Hall (the old fire station) and the Dispatch office is located in the Court House.

A philosophical transition has occurred within the Police Department. When the department was first organized, its traditional objective was to "catch the culprit". Now, the police department focuses on crime prevention and outreach. The police department is committed to working in partnerships with other entities in the area to implement proactive strategies to maintain a high quality of life.

The patrol division of the police force consists of the Police Chief and ten officers. The officers are assigned to one of two squads, each squad having a sergeant. Often considered the backbone of a police agency, the officers in the patrol division are the first responders to all police calls. Officers must have the skills, knowledge and ability to prepare for and handle virtually every aspect of public safety. Duties include crime reduction and prevention strategies and problem solving which requires proficiency in oral and written communication and specific law enforcement training.

The Gunnison Police Department strives to be visible, friendly and approachable in the community in effort to create a healthy and safe

community. Their mission statement is “The Gunnison Police Department exists to maintain a high quality life through the prevention of crime, fair and equal treatment of all, and education in partnership with the citizens of Gunnison and its visitors: Prevention, Education, Partnership. ”

Fire Department

The Gunnison Fire Department was first established as a volunteer “hose company” in 1880 wherein a hose cart was pulled to the site and connected to the water system to extinguish the fire. The Fire Department remains an all volunteer department with a maximum membership of 40.

As of 2006, there are two fire protection entities in Gunnison County: the City of Gunnison Volunteer Fire Department, and the Gunnison County Fire Protection District. Each has their own funding source: the City Fire Department is funded from City sales tax, while the County’s FPD is funded from property taxes. Each has different jurisdictions and their own equipment, but they work as a team and offer mutual aid for other districts when necessary. The fire station located at Spruce and New York houses all of the vehicles and equipment for both entities.

The City of Gunnison Fire Department is composed of a chief, two assistant chiefs, four lieutenants and a captain. The chief and the assistant chiefs are paid positions (flat rate) and are funded equally from the City of Gunnison and the Gunnison County Fire Protection District. The Fire Marshal is a regular full-time City employee whose salary is paid entirely by the City of Gunnison.

Discussion has ensued in years past about consolidating the fire districts into one entity. The most important advantage is that the administrative functions would become more organized and less expensive to operate. The disadvantage has mainly been due to the issues with taxation. For example, the City of Gunnison residents do not currently pay property taxes for fire protection, but County residents do. The question then becomes, should the City of Gunnison residents pay additional property taxes for the rest of the County’s fire protection? A well devised plan could perhaps solve this issue, and this issue should be a community decision.

Gunnison Hazardous Materials Crew

The City of Gunnison and Gunnison County formed a hazardous materials team in 1987 to mitigate the hazards caused by the accidental or suspicious release of hazardous materials. The team originally consisted of eight volunteer members trained to the

operational level of response. Now, the team is made of 24 volunteers, who participate in ongoing training. Volunteers are paid per call by the City or the County, depending on the location of the call.

The hazardous materials crew purchased a hazardous materials response vehicle in 2005 with a grant from Homeland Security. The hazardous materials team also has a 20' trailer.

There currently exists a mutual aid agreement between Gunnison County, the City of Gunnison, the Bureau of Land Management and the Colorado State Patrol for assistance with hazardous material mitigation.

Emergency Medical Services

Since 1987, emergency medical services (EMS) have been provided to both the City and County of Gunnison by the Gunnison Ambulance Service. This service is operated by the Gunnison Valley Hospital. Gunnison EMS provides 24 hour emergency calls by ambulance, aids the Gunnison Fire Department and provides mutual aid for neighboring rescue organizations (WSC Search and Rescue).

EMS has four ambulances with advanced life support (paramedic equipment). The staff ranges between ten and fifteen people who are trained in advanced and basic life support. The EMS has the ability to respond to unique situations in unique locations with 6-wheelers, snow machines, rope rescues (with the mountain rescue team), sleds, horseback, and all terrain vehicles.

The EMS assumes the medical responsibility for most situations in the County, including the medical component for the hazardous materials team, special events (football games, Cattlemen's days, motorcycle and bicycle races, etc. Further, the EMS takes a leading role in public education for first aid and CPR classes (2,000 people per year), and emergency medical technician training.

Trends in the Gunnison Valley and the Need for Additional Services

As stated in the economics chapter, moderate population growth (1.5%) is used in this Master Plan for the basis of future needs. Population growth is anticipated for several reasons: one is due to second homeowners and retiring baby boomers who want healthy lifestyles (such as what Gunnison offers). Immigration will likely continue to increase. In addition, mining and drilling operations could impact the Gunnison valley, bringing more jobs and more people.

Both the Gunnison Police Department and the Fire Department have expanded their role in the community. Police services have traditionally been responsive in nature; but the Gunnison Police Department is more pro-active in recent years with higher police visibility and outreach

efforts to stop crime before it occurs. Police outreach is important for Gunnison's citizens based on public input throughout the Master Plan process.

The fire department has also seen a shift of responsibility. Instead of merely responding to calls, outreach efforts are pursued. For example, the fire department is researching the feasibility of providing a facility for household wastes, such as paints and batteries. They are also considering a workshop to educate homeowners on how to handle and store toxic household chemicals.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS, POLICIES AND ACTION ITEMS

Desired Future Conditions

- To provide for public safety and services to meet the needs of the current and future population by ensuring the orderly and safe conversion of developable lands within the City, the Urban Growth Boundary, and the Three-Mile Planning area.
- Create a feeling of security through the protection of person and property; preserve public peace and order; prevent, detect and solve crimes; facilitate the safe movement of people and vehicles.
- For public safety entities to remain highly visible and available to the community to understand the community and its trends.

Policies and Action Items

Policy

1 Public Safety Services

Provide adequate public safety services to meet the changing needs of the community. Actions items to implement this policy include:

1. Maintain certifications and participate in ongoing education for all public safety officials.
2. Continue to provide education to the citizens of Gunnison to encourage proactive citizens.

Policy

2 Public/Private Partnerships

Form public/private partnerships with businesses and local and regional groups, including Western State College, and Gunnison County to promote community involvement with police services. Action to include:

1. Utilize “problem oriented policing” to identify and address chronic criminal behavior.
2. Develop a strategic plan with other entities to evaluate service demands and mutual aid policies that will benefit the community by implementing cost savings approaches.

Policy

3

Police Visibility

Increase police visibility by participating in local functions and events.

Actions to include:

1. Strengthen links between the police and the community by participating in programs and events such as: Toys for Tots, Cityscape, Cattlemens’ Days Parade, Car Show, Ride the Rockies, homecoming events, parades, GVH Charity Run, 4th of July Fireworks, Emergency Services Exposition, etc.
2. Continue to offer an annual “Police Academy” to WSC students and citizens, which began in 2005.

Policy

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Economic Viability

Evaluate options for economic viability for police and safety services.

Actions to include:

1. Explore funding strategies including grants and other mechanisms (e.g., fee in lieu or land dedications) to install future police and fire facilities.
2. Develop and implement a strategic plan that addresses public safety trends, population growth and demography changes, and the costs associated therewith.
3. Evaluate the feasibility of consolidating fire districts to improve efficiency and reduce costs.
4. Amend the Land Development Code to allow sufficient public safety services, but that would reduce development standards in appropriately zoned areas, such as business/industrial parks.